



From left to right: Marsh Smith, co-inventor; David P. Smith, Deputy, Assistant Secretary, Dept. of the Interior; Dr. Jay Carter, co-inventor; Michael Bean, Environmental Defense; Mark Cantrell, co-inventor; Ralph Costa, co-inventor; Fred Krupp, President, Environmental Defense.

Pinehurst was the site of the 10th Anniversary of the Safe Harbor Program

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Environmental Defense and the Pinehurst Resort recently celebrated the 10th anniversary of an innovative, partner-driven conservation initiative known as the Safe Harbor program. Pinehurst Resort was the first landowner to sign up for the program created in the Sandhills of North Carolina to protect the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker.

In the 10 years since the Safe Harbor program was first created, 327 landowners have signed up to be part of 31 Safe Harbor agreements in 17 states protecting more than 3.5 million acres of habitat for 35 species.

Safe Harbor is a unique agreement where private landowners volunteer to work in partnership with government and non-government agencies to help ensure the survival of imperiled wildlife, plants and fish. A decade ago biologists from ED, FWS, and Fort Bragg, and researchers from North Carolina State University joined conservationists in the Sandhills of North Carolina to see if the idea of a "Safe Harbor" could really work.

"Since much of the habitat for endangered species in the U.S. is found on private land, it is imperative that we create incentive-based opportunities such as the Safe Harbor program to bolster our conservation efforts and strengthen partnerships with landowners," said David P. Smith, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. "Trust is a vital component. And Pinehurst was the first among hundreds of private landowners to play leading role in making good things happen when stakeholders are engaged in a cooperative effort to protect imperiled species. It's important for me to acknowledge the key role played by our partners – particularly Michael Bean of Environmental Defense – who were a driving force in building this program with us."

"Safe Harbor has helped all of us accomplish many things over the last decade," Fred Krupp, Environmental Defense's president, said. "The fact that we are joined here together, environmentalists, landowners, government biologists, golf course managers, and that we're actually happy to be here together is among the greatest accomplishments to which we owe Safe Harbor credit."

The red-cockaded woodpecker was listed as endangered in 1970 mainly due to habitat loss. More than 95 percent of the longleaf pine ecosystem in the southeast had been lost to agriculture, timber management, and development. It was clear that private conservation support and involvement of private conservation was essential for the survival of this woodpecker. However, the listing of the RCW as an endangered species caused landowners to feel threatened by the potential of federal restrictions on traditional land uses, particularly the harvest of mature pine timber. This shared dilemma for wildlife biologists, who needed habitat for an endangered woodpecker, and landowners, who wanted assurances that making their land attractive for an endangered species would not become a liability, led to a shared resolution, a “safe harbor” for both species and landowners.